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Research Memorandum
RSB-169, October 26, 1962

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SUBJECT: Soviet Bloc Civil Air Access Routes to Cuba

DEPUTY UNDER
SECRETARY OF STATE

This paper examines bloc civil air channels to Cuba as of October 25, 1962, and some of the points where flights can be either interdicted or inspected. Because of rapidly changing developments, some facts may have changed by the time this paper is published.

ABSTRACT

The US naval quarantine on arms shipments to Cuba gives vital significance to air transport from the bloc as a means of maintenance support for Soviet installations. Using huge TU-114 and IL-18 turboprop aircraft via Africa and South America, in addition to scheduled Czech and Cuban flights over the North Atlantic, the USSR can fly in high-priority cargo and skilled personnel. Atomic warheads as well as spare parts for missile systems and jet aircraft can easily be handled by air transport.

As of October 23, 1962, Moscow had three air channels to Cuba: (1) Aeroflot flights over the North Atlantic via the UK and Canada; (2) Aeroflot flights via the Mediterranean, Africa, and Latin America; (3) Czech and Cuban airline flights from Prague via Ireland and Canada.

Canada has now refused, and the UK reportedly will refuse, the USSR transit rights to Cuba, blocking this route except for possible long-range flights from Europe. Canada has also begun inspection of Czech and Cuban aircraft; however, these flights, currently the most effective because of their number, remain valuable for movement of skilled personnel.

US approaches to African countries requesting interdiction of Soviet flights carrying arms to Cuba have met with initially favorable responses, especially from Guinea and Senegal, which have been important transit points. In view, however, of Soviet pressures on these countries, it is possible that Moscow will achieve some flights through Africa, and possibly through some points in Latin America. The effectiveness of inspection for arms by some of these countries is also open to question.

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I. ROLE OF AIR TRANSPORT IN LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

With the imposition of a US naval quarantine against military deliveries to Cuba, air transport to Havana becomes a vital link for Soviet logistical support and for movement of key personnel. Aircraft can bring in badly needed spare parts, electronic instruments, and other high-priority, non-bulk cargo, as well as skilled military personnel and technicians essential for maintenance of complex military installations. Spare parts for much of the highly specialized equipment used in missile sites, jet aircraft, radar, and communications equipment are relatively small and therefore easily handled by large transport aircraft. Of most significance, they can carry in nuclear warheads for missiles and nuclear bombs for aircraft already in Cuba.

Effective Soviet use of the TU-114, the world's largest civil aircraft, supplemented by the IL-18, a four-motored turboprop plane roughly equivalent to the Electra, and by the weekly scheduled flights made by Czech and Cuban airlines operating Bristol Britannias could contribute important logistical support for minimal sustenance operation of much of the complex military equipment now in Cuba.

II. CHANNELS EXISTING AS OF OCTOBER 25, 1962

At present the bloc has three distinct channels for transmitting freight and personnel to Cuba by air. All three are tenuous in varying degree in that they are subject to interdiction of inspection because of passage through NATO countries or negotiation with neutralist countries in Africa or Latin America.

1. Aeroflot Non-Scheduled Flights Via the North Atlantic

The USSR has been making an increasing number of non-scheduled IL-18 flights to Havana via Prestwick, Scotland, and Gander, Newfoundland, since the spring of 1962. Canada has maintained some surveillance by placing "courtesy crews" on these aircraft between Gander and Havana.

On October 23 the Canadian Government advised the USSR that it would not permit further Soviet flights to Cuba through or over Canadian territory except in a few special cases, such as planes carrying high Soviet officials to the UN. Soviet lack of membership in ICAO was cited as the reason for this action. The UK has also announced in NATO that it plans to refuse further Soviet stopovers on British territory enroute to Cuba.

Although these actions would appear to block Soviet use of the North Atlantic route, it is still listed as a possible channel because of the possibility of direct Soviet flights via long-range TU-114 or by long-range IL-18-I from a European point.

2. Aeroflot Non-Scheduled and Scheduled Flights Via the South Atlantic

In mid-July 1962 the USSR made a TU-114 test flight, described as preliminary to regular service, from Moscow to Havana via Conakry, Guinea. This flight proceeded non-stop from Moscow, directly across Northern and Central Africa to Guinea, and then non-stop to Havana. It carried a group of high-level Aeroflot officials who negotiated an air agreement with the Castro government and announced that regular service would begin "soon."

Initial service was scheduled to begin on October 5 but was abruptly cancelled, apparently because of Guinean refusal to permit regular onward flights through Conakry to Latin America. On October 20, TASS announced that regular weekly TU-114 service to Havana had begun "a few days ago," referring to a TU-114 flight which had flown to Havana via Dakar, Senegal, on October 17/18.

The USSR has scheduled and requested permission for several IL-18 flights to Havana via Belgrade-Rabat-Dakar-Recife-Port of Spain. The exact number of flights made is uncertain. Another IL-18 flight via this route has been scheduled for late in October.

3. Czech Airlines - Air Cubana Scheduled Flights Between Prague and Havana Via the North Atlantic

Both the Czech and Cuban airlines operate one round-trip weekly between Prague and Havana. This scheduled service is frequently increased by extra flights. The route is from Prague to Shannon (or Prestwick), Gander (or Goose Bay, Labrador), to Havana and return. Czech and Cuban requests for permission to land at Kindley Air Force Base in Bermuda have been refused by the US and the UK.

Both countries use four-motored, turbo-prop Bristol Britannias. Cuba has two and Czechoslovakia one. Czech attempts to use IL-18's have been refused by the Irish Government on the grounds that the IL-18 does not conform with ICAO safety requirements.

This channel is by far the most effective and fully utilized air link between the bloc and Cuba. It is also the most legally secure since both Czechoslovakia and Cuba are members of ICAO and IATA and have full air agreements with Ireland, Canada, and the UK. Flights are heavily loaded, and in view of the extra flights which have been run it appears that traffic operates at nearly maximum possible volume for the limited equipment available.

Recently Czechoslovakia has been trying to purchase additional Britannias from the UK in order to increase flights over this route.

A CSA (Czech Airlines) plane flew from Goose Bay, Labrador, to Havana on October 24, 1962, a few hours after the US quarantine order had gone into effect.

4. Discontinuance of Fourth Channel

In addition to the above three channels a fourth channel operated until October 23, 1962 and is listed here for the record. This was KLM (Royal Dutch Airline) twice-a-week, DC-6 flights from Moscow to Havana via Amsterdam and Curacao. There have been several press reports of large numbers of bloc technicians entering Cuba by this route. []

is believed to have used KLM primarily for diplomatic travel and for bona fide economic technicians. No cargo estimates are available. The USSR

On October 23, 1962 KLM announced the suspension of all service to Havana.

III. AIRCRAFT USED AND LOAD POTENTIAL

1. Aeroflot

The IL-18, a four-motored, turbo-prop plane similar to the US Lockheed Electra, has a maximum range of about 3,000 miles, a cruising speed of about 400 miles per hour and a maximum load capacity of about 25,000 pounds or 100 passengers. The IL-18-I, a newer version, has a substantially longer range but few of these models are believed to be in service. After overcoming some technical defects which were corrected in 1960 and 1961, the USSR has made extensive use of the IL-18 and it is now flown on Aeroflot runs to Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Normally IL-18 flights to Cuba require two intermediate stops on either North or South Atlantic routes. The IL-18 can land and take off from most modern airports in Europe, Africa and Latin America.

The TU-114, the aircraft on which Khrushchev traveled to the US in 1960, is the world's largest civil aircraft. A converted version of the BEAR bomber, it is highly uneconomic but nevertheless impressive in range and load capacity. Its maximum range is estimated at about 6,000 miles with a maximum payload of 220 passengers or 34,000 pounds of freight. More average figures give the TU-114 a range of 5,400 miles carrying 170 passengers or 28,000 pounds of cargo.

Because of its long range and large capacity the TU-114 is uniquely suited to provide sizeable airlift support to Cuba. Using it, Moscow can fly to Havana with only one stop enroute, avoiding all NATO-controlled territory and dependence on NATO-controlled navigational facilities.

Four TU-114 flights to Cuba per month could carry as much as 135,000 pounds (more than 60 tons) of high-priority cargo or more than 800 personnel or a mix of both.

The TU-114 needs a runway of at least 6,000 feet to land and at least 7,500 feet to take off. Fully loaded, a takeoff runway of at least 8,500-9,000 feet is more realistic. It requires a high degree of servicing and large stocks

of spare parts. Nevertheless, Aeroflot has been operating this plane fairly regularly between Moscow and the Siberian Far East and has been continually making improvements in its operation. Inventory is believed to be more than 20. With the use of the necessary stopover point in Africa its regular flight to Cuba would be entirely feasible.

2. CSA - Air Cubana

The Bristol Britannia, a four-motored, turbo-prop plane, has a maximum range of 4,300 miles and a cruising speed of about 350 miles per hour. The Britannia carries a maximum freight load of 23,500 pounds or 130 passengers. The three of these aircraft now being used between Prague and Cuba are reported to be in only fair condition. Flights are heavily loaded and maintenance has often been poor.

In one month the minimum of eight flights into Cuba operated by this route can carry a maximum of 188,000 pounds of cargo or 1,040 passengers.

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1. These data are for the "320" model of the Britannia, the type owned by Cuba and Czechoslovakia.

IV. POINTS SUBJECT TO INTERDICTION OR SEARCH

1. Aeroflot North Atlantic Route

As noted above, on October 23 the Canadian Government advised the USSR that it would no longer permit Aeroflot flights through its territory other than in a few exceptional cases. Although this action substantially blocks Soviet civil air access to Havana along this route, it does not rule out long-range TU-114 flights carrying a reduced payload from a European point.

Although the UK has announced in NATO that it will refuse Soviet requests for flights to Cuba through Prestwick, there is no confirmation that this action has yet been taken.

2. Aeroflot South Atlantic Route

Soviet flights to Cuba along this route (Africa - Latin America) can pass through or overfly several countries, which, because of neutralism, non-alignment, and nationalism might be hesitant if not definitely opposed to a policy of outright refusal of Soviet requests for transit rights. However, the initial responses from many of these countries has been favorable to an interdiction of military items enroute to Cuba. It is not certain that all of these countries will be able to maintain their positions in the face of strong Soviet pressure, nor is it even certain that their initial responses to the US were entirely sincere.

a. Algeria - Although neither the USSR nor Czechoslovakia has yet negotiated an air agreement with Algeria, it is considered a logical stopping point for bloc air routes in North Africa. Ben Bella has told our Ambassador that his government will not grant landing or overflight rights for the purpose of supporting Cuba, adding that such permission would be out of the question. Ben Bella's ability to maintain this position under strong Soviet pressure may be questionable, however.

The large international airport at Maison Blanche, outside Algiers, has recently been turned over to Algerian control. (French, or other non-Algerian, technicians, however, are vital for the operation of these aircraft, such as the IL-18 and TU-114.)

A direct TU-114 flight from Algiers to Havana, a distance of about 5,000 miles, is feasible with a payload only slightly less than that which could be airlifted from Dakar or Conakry. Algeria would be a useful alternate for IL-18 flights to Cuba should both Morocco and Senegal refuse.

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b. Morocco - The Moroccan Government has been vague in response to Embassy Rabat queries as to whether its air agreement with the USSR, concluded in March 1962, permits onward Soviet flights to Latin America, giving the impression -- perhaps deliberately -- that this matter is still subject to negotiation. Morocco recently granted Aeroflot permission to overfly its territory in making TU-114 flights to Cuba via Dakar and Conakry. The Moroccan Ambassador has told Assistant Secretary Williams that he was certain his Government would not permit the use of Moroccan airspace as facilities for supplying military equipment, but his assurances clearly were not authoritative. The distance from Morocco to Havana, roughly 4,500 miles, and about the same distance to Havana from Guinea could easily be covered by a TU-114 carrying a good payload.

Outside of existing US military installations, such as Nouasseur, near Casablanca, no Moroccan civil airfield is capable of handling TU-114 landings. One former US Air Force installation, at Boulhaut, has been turned over to Morocco. Its runways probably could accommodate large Soviet aircraft.

Official responses to US requests for Moroccan interdiction of future Soviet flights clearly destined for Cuba are likely to prove unsatisfactory over the next several months.

c. Guinea - Guinea has a full air agreement with the USSR, signed in January 1962, and Conakry is a regular stopping point for both Aeroflot and Czech Airline flights to West Africa. However, when Moscow confidently scheduled weekly TU-114 flights to Havana via a new Soviet-built airport at Conakry beginning October 5, it suddenly discovered that the Guineans did not find it feasible to clear the flight, ostensibly for lack of appropriate fuel.

The Guinean Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on October 24 told our Ambassador that his government has no intention of granting the Soviet Union landing or overflight rights for flights to Cuba or Latin America.

d. Senegal - Because of its proximity to Brazil, Dakar is a key point in West Africa for Soviet civil air access to Cuba. It is the obvious jumping-off point for IL-18 flights across the South Atlantic, and its existing landing strips are also long enough to accommodate the TU-114.

Senegal has an air agreement with Czechoslovakia but none with the USSR. In July 1962 the Senegalese Government assured Embassy Dakar that Senegal had no intention of negotiating an air agreement with the USSR and stated that Prime Minister Dia had not discussed such an agreement during his visit to Moscow.

Early in October Senegal granted the USSR "routine flight clearance" for a technical stop-by in Dakar for the TU-114 which flew to Havana from Moscow October 18 and returned through Dakar October 24. An urgent and high-level request to the Senegalese Government to withhold further clearances yielded a sympathetic response, with a request for a letter summarizing the problem and the US position.

The Senegalese Foreign Minister informed our Ambassador that the use by either side of Dakar airport for military purpose would not be permitted, saying this applied specifically to military shipments to Cuba. The New York Times on October 26 reported that the President of Senegal stated he had refused a request for landing rights in Dakar for Soviet planes enroute to Cuba.

The fact that Guinea is not cooperating with the bloc on the Havana run impresses the Senegalese, and as long as the Guinean position holds, the Senegalese will almost certainly not want to provide the single stop-over point in West Africa. Should the Guineans modify their position, the Senegalese might have reservations concerning interdiction. The probability, however, is that they will not endorse the inauguration of a regular scheduled Soviet or Czech flight to Havana. Should they do so, they would almost certainly agree to inspection.

e. Brazil - Although Brazil gave the US strong support on the OAS resolution for arms quarantine of Cuba, domestic political issues and determination to play a role independent from US leadership make it difficult to predict Brazilian reaction to a US request for interdiction or for search and inspection of Soviet flights to Cuba transiting Brazilian territory.

Recently Brazil has granted permission for Soviet IL-18 flights to Havana via Recife, although it has not responded to Soviet and Czech overtures for a regular air agreement.

It is possible that Brazil would agree to Soviet requests for irregular, occasional flights through or over Brazilian territory to Cuba but would be negative to a large number of flights or flights on a regular basis.

The fact that the Air Force Command based in Recife is strongly anti-communist and pro-US makes it appear probable that search and inspection procedures, which the Brazilian Government would probably agree to under ICAO regulations, would be rigorously and thoroughly carried out.

f. Trinidad - The Trinidad-Tobago Government, which received its independence on August 31, 1962, has taken a strongly neutralist, anti-US as well as anti-Soviet foreign policy line, demanding more foreign

aid "from any source." The government has granted the USSR overflight requests for several projected TU-114 flights since July, as well as rights for IL-18 flights from Brazil.

Although it is difficult to predict whether or not Trinidad will agree to interdiction of all Soviet flights through or over its territory to Cuba, it would probably agree to inspection under ICAO regulations, particularly in view of Canadian agreement to do so.

g. Jamaica - Jamaica has advised that it will not permit "regular Soviet flights to Cuba" to transit Kingston. Its policy on non-scheduled Aeroflot flights is not clear. Jamaica would probably agree to inspection of Soviet aircraft for arms under ICAO regulations.

h. Other countries on South Atlantic route - Several African countries whose importance as transit points for bloc flights to Cuba is marginal, but would nevertheless serve as part of an alternate route, have given assurances that no over-flight or transit rights will be granted for flights to Cuba. Sudan has advised that any Soviet requests for military flights or air transport of military equipment will be denied. Libya has stated that it will not accede to Soviet bloc requests for over-flights whose destination is Cuba. Liberia and Congo (Brazzaville) have both indicated that permission will not be granted.

3. CSA - Air Cubana North Atlantic Route

As noted above, both Czechoslovakia and Cuba are members of ICAO and their scheduled flights between Prague and Havana are operated under regular air agreements which both countries have with the UK, Ireland, and Canada. Although unilateral denial of landing rights by the UK, Canada, or Ireland probably cannot be expected, both the UK and Canada have indicated their willingness to carry out inspection of Czech and Cuban planes under provisions of Articles 16 and 35 of the ICAO Convention. These provisions permit inspection of an aircraft's documents to determine the nature of its cargo and prohibit the carrying without permission of "munitions and implements of war as defined by laws of the country" over which the plane is flying.

On October 23 the Canadian Government advised Cuba and Czechoslovakia that inspection for arms or military equipment would be made on all Cuba-bound aircraft passing through Newfoundland. The first inspection was made on October 24.

No information is yet available as to whether the UK has begun search and inspection procedures.